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Lebanese premier goes to Syria talks

FILE ONLY

From Chicago Tribune wires

BEIRUT—Prime Minister Rashid Karami left Thursday for Damascus to discuss the resignation of his cabinet with Syrian officials, who reportedly were pressing him to remain in office. Meanwhile, new fighting erupted between militias in West Beirut.

In other developments, a Lebanese official of the American University of Beirut was kidnaped, and newspapers ran an appeal from Jesse Jackson for the release of five abducted Americans.

Karami departed by army helicopter for the Syrian capital. His spokesmen said his talks with Syrian officials would concentrate on the conditions in Beirut that led to his resignation Wednesday.

Karami, 63, a Sunni Moslem, resigned to protest what he called a "horrific nightmare" of violence—fierce street battles between Sunni and Shiite Moslem militias for control of West Beirut.

Machine-gun bursts and rocket-propelled grenade explosions shook the city at midmorning Thursday after a nightlong lull, sending people on the street diving for cover.

Shops that had opened after a two-day shutdown quickly lowered their shutters. Motorists sped through the streets blowing their horns.

The state radio said militiamen were shooting in the air to express grief at funerals for slain comrades.

Police said the latest casualty count in fighting on Tuesday and Wednesday stood at 33 killed and 135 wounded.

The Sunni militia appeared to have gotten the worst of the battle. The Sunni defeat weakened Karami's base of support and he telephoned his resignation to President Amin Gemayel, a Maronite Christian. Radio stations said Gemayel asked Karami to stay on until a new government can be formed.

The nation's senior Sunni leaders met Thursday at the headquarters of Grand Mufti Sheik Hassan Khaled, the Sunnis' spiritual leader, to discuss Karami's resignation.

In a joint communique they "profoundly denounced" the street clashes that pitted the dominant Shiite Amal militia against the

Sunni irregulars of the Mourabitoun—Arabic for "ambushers"—who once were allies.

Amal was backed by Druse militiamen in routing the Mourabitoun from their traditional strongholds in West Beirut's Tarik Jedida, Zarif, Mazraa and Caracas neighborhoods.

Guards said a grenade fired from a speeding car exploded outside a Druse militia office two blocks from where the Sunni leaders were meeting and one Druse militiaman was killed.

The Sunni-controlled station Voice of the Nation said Syrian officials have told Karami that Lebanon cannot afford a cabinet crisis.

Radio stations and an independent newspaper, An-Nahar, said Gemayel consulted by telephone for an hour with Syria's president, Hafez Assad, who "counseled restraint and patience."

Syria, which has at least 30,000 troops in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley, became the major power broker in the country after the U.S. peacekeeping effort ended in February, 1984. Assad sponsored the national unity government Karami formed on April 30, 1984.

Early Thursday morning, George Sayegh, acting vice president for administration at the American University, was seized by gunmen who broke into his house in West Beirut, the university said in a statement.

The gunmen forced Sayegh, a Greek Orthodox Christian in his early 50s, into his own car and drove him away, it said. The statement said Sayegh, the latest victim in a string of kidnappings, has heart trouble and needs to take special medicine.

Beirut newspapers, meanwhile, published an open letter from Jackson, an unsuccessful candidate for the U.S. Democratic presidential nomination last year, calling for the release of five American hostages as a step toward clearing the way for an international Mideast peace conference involving Lebanon.

The missing Americans are American University librarian Peter Kilburn, diplomat William Buckley, Presbyterian minister Benjamin Weir, Roman Catholic priest Lawrence Jenco and journalist Terry Anderson, all seized in West Beirut over the last 13 months.